

# News Release

## *National Wildlife Refuge System*



### **Carolina Sandhills National Wildlife Refuge**

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#### **Refuge to Begin Conducting Prescribed Burns in February**

Carolina Sandhills National Wildlife Refuge will begin conducting annual prescribed burns beginning in February and continuing into early June. Prescribed burning, the intentional application of fire to meet stated land management objectives, plays an essential role in the longleaf pine-wiregrass ecosystem that dominates the refuge. Prescribed burns are conducted under an approved plan with adequate firefighting resources and appropriate weather conditions to reduce hazardous fuels that build up in the absence of natural fires. To prevent loss of property or life from a wildfire, prescribed burning is an effective habitat management tool to eliminate woody fuel build-up.

Since the refuge began prescribed burning, only a few wildfires have occurred despite the area having one of the highest lightening strike occurrences in the state of South Carolina. Prescribed burning reduces the total amount of vegetation and mimics the natural disturbance events that once occurred in Southeastern pine forests. Refuge biologists work closely with Refuge fire personnel to develop a plan that will benefit wildlife and promote the habitat needs of endangered species. All burn plans are developed using national standards by qualified and experienced fire management professionals. The plans are extensively reviewed and must be approved by the Refuge Manager prior to ignition. Firefighters from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other cooperators will conduct the burns.

Fire Management personnel at Carolina Sandhills National Wildlife Refuge will closely monitor weather and fuel conditions to maximize results and minimize smoke impacts on adjacent communities. Burns will only be conducted during the daytime hours. Highways 1 and 145 may be impacted by smoke for short periods. Smoke may also be visible from the surrounding areas. Appropriate signage and/or personnel will be in place for traffic control if needed.

Carolina Sandhills National Wildlife Refuge, established in 1939, contains 46,000 acres of rolling sand hills dominated by the longleaf pine-wiregrass ecosystem. This ecosystem provides for the needs of more than 190 species of birds, 42 species of mammals, 41 species of reptiles, and 25 species of amphibians. More than 800 species of plants have been identified on the refuge, including rare species of pitcher plants, Well's pixie-moss, and the white-wicky. The refuge is open year-round for wildlife-dependent recreation: thousands of visitors participate in fishing, wildlife observation, hunting, nature photography, hiking and environmental education programs and events.

##### End of Release #####